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Sources for development of a small school in Sri Lanka: A case study

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A case study on a Tamil Medium Type 3 mixed school was conducted to identify features related to a small school (SS) and suggest a developmental model. The objectives were to study the historical development of the SS, to identify current educational, socio-economic, cultural and political contribution of the SS to the development of the village, to investigate the nature and factors for the present status of the SS with regard to its development, to analyze the strengths and weaknesses in its present societal role, to suggest a model with policy options and innovative activities for transforming the SS into a catalyst of rural development. The SS was situated 72 km from the town and public transport was not available. The school caters to the children in a tea estate. Two teachers were 'primary trained' and one teacher had a postgraduate diploma. The tea estate and tea factory buildings were used as school premises, and in 2007, the SS got a new building. Data were collected using two methods i.e. data from outside the SS (Unstructured interviews with education officials, data from Grama Niladhari, Samurdhi Niladhari, Health Officials, Past Pupils and Community Members) and data from the SS (Documentary data on historical development, unstructured interviews with principals and teachers, unstructured observation at school and classroom, student competencies test to Grade 4, 5 students). Data analysis focused on backward village environment, possibilities for growing as a SS that can be developed and converted into a SS which serves the community, philosophy of the principal on SS and rural community, role of teachers as partners in community development, and ways of developing the teacher skills to increase the standards of SS. The identified issues were that the SS was situated in a remote area, difficulties for teachers to access the SS, lack of infrastructure and health facilities, uneducated people, and malnutrition. Suggested remedial measures were to guarantee a safe and protective environment for children, developing infrastructure to be useful for teachers; raise teacher's level of motivation and success, develop SS using school mapping, mobilize the parental and community support for SS, implement non formal education programmes, encourage optimal enrolment and completion of school education, enhance children's health and well-being, and ensure children's optimal academic achievement. A model with specific suggestions and intervention strategies applicable to the SS environment were developed.

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